



44th SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of the child

Panel 2: Ensuring children's rights through a healthy environment: a call to action

Key takeaways from the discussion:

The right to a healthy environment could be one of the most important human rights of this century.

Children are vulnerable to climate change, but they are also key change actors. They are becoming key political actors of climate action.

Background documentation:

- [A/HRC/RES/40/14](#) Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 22 March 2019: "Rights of the child: empowering children with disabilities for the enjoyment of their human rights, including through inclusive education"
- [A/HRC/43/30](#) Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights "Realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment"

Moderator: H.E. Mr. Ricardo González Arenas - Ambassador of Uruguay to the UN in Geneva:

Children find themselves in a **vulnerable situation** because of climate change, but they also represent our **future and our hopes**. Last year, we have seen a growth in the awareness of young people on the need to protect the environment. We have to listen to children and **include them in decision making**. Governments have a special responsibility in protecting children's rights.

Children are becoming important **human rights defenders** today. It is key that children participate in this annual full-day discussion.

I urge all actors to share their best practices and lessons learned to **enhance the protection of the rights of the child, through environment action**.

Children love this planet but fear the future. This summarizes the very essence of this debate. All of us in this room, we need to ensure that our children have no fear in connection with the future.

Mr. David R. Boyd, Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment:

We are not treating our home with the respect that it deserves. The latest example is the **Covid-19 pandemic**. Governments ignored scientists warnings about Covid-19 in the past 20 years, creating a perfect storm of conditions for wild-life to human transmission of diseases. Just as governments ignored warnings from Covid-19, **states continue to ignore warnings related to climate change**.

We know that children are vulnerable to climate change, but they are also **key change actors**. Young people have one thing in common: **they love this planet and nature, but they fear the future**. They want governments to protect their rights and to listen to their call.

If we are committed to respect the rights of children, then we **need to recognize the right of healthy environment for everyone**, especially children. We have the **opportunity to save millions of lives**. The **right to a healthy and sustainable environment could be one of the most important human rights of the 21st century**.

States need to step up, scale up and speed up **rights-based actions**, to stop deforestation, to invest in green energy and build a sustainable future. Two simple questions can be asked to every delegate in this room:

- Does your state recognize the **right to a healthy environment in its constitution?**

- Has your state ratified the optional protocol of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**?

We have to put children's rights into legislation. This Council has a key role to play in **passing a resolution that recognizes every person's right to live in a healthy, clean and sustainable environment.**

Mr. Sanjay Wijesekera, Director of Programmes, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):

Children's access to a clean and sustainable environment is essential for their development. UNICEF fully supports the **global recognition of a human rights for healthy, clean, and sustainable environment.**

Children are **agents of change for climate action**, they have more and more opportunities to participate in decision making and have a right to share their view and to be heard.

Many fear that Covid-19 has caused a set back. However, it is also an **opportunity to improve** our response and imagine a greener and more sustainable future. The pandemic cannot be used as an excuse to slow down the climate action, on the contrary, it should be an **accelerator.**

We also call on all states to **hear children** and to ensure a clean and sustainable environment for this generation and the next to come. UNICEF stands ready to **support all actors** in this process.

Carmen Juliana, Child environmental human rights defender from Colombia

I represent the fight of young children in Latin America and their hope for a better world. I am here to make sure we **implement environmental rights.** The situation is now more difficult because of policies focusing on predatory use of nature.

We have identified some of the problems that affect us the most:

- Violations of children rights by **companies and governments.**
- Imposition of **adult ideas**
- Lack of **education and awareness.**
- De-forestation, air, water, and soil pollution, rising green house effect and mismanagement of waste.

We want this space to **go beyond formal statements.** We commit ourselves to campaigning for and promoting environmental and children's rights. What is happening to our rivers? What will happen to our biodiversity? We want to breath clean air.

We demand that you, world leaders, realize that **if we continue to destroy nature, we will not have a future.** Please count on us as political actors, we need to be **involved in decision-making** and listen to all our voices. **We are not the generation of destruction but the generation of change and solution.**

Ms. Henriette Ahrens, Deputy Director of Programmes, UNICEF:

Climate change is a **child rights crisis.** Negative effects are disproportionately experienced by girls, indigenous children, children with disabilities.

We have an **obligation to hear children** all around the world calling for climate action. They have the right to speak up and to be heard. Not because we think it is a nice thing to do but **because it is our obligation.**

At a time when the world is in a deep health crisis, attention must not be diverted from the environmental emergency.

We call on **member states to act quickly.** Children's rights must be placed at the heart of environmental policies. **The right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment for all must be recognized.**



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Discussion with states and NGOs

Webcast can be accessed here: <http://webtv.un.org/search/panel-discussion-on-a-healthy-environment-4th-meeting-44th-regular-session-human-rights-council-/6168583395001/?term=&lan=english&page=2>

States that took the floor during the discussion (23 states):

European Union, Iceland, Monaco, Fiji, Sierra Leone, Japan, Colombia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Panama, Cuba, Germany, South Africa, Iraq, Morocco, North Macedonia, Nepal, Slovenia, Myanmar, Belarus, Poland, Kenya, Indonesia, Georgia.

International Organizations and NGOs that took the floor during the discussion (9):

UNEP, FAO, Terre des hommes Federation Internationale, Conselho Indigenista Missionário Cimi, Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, Health and Environment Program (HEP), Global Institute for Water, Environment & Health, Earthjustice.

